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Repressive bodies, transgressive bodies : Dracula and the feminine

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REPRESSIVE BODIES, TRANSGRESSIVE BODIES:

DRACULA AND THE FEMININE



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Bachelor of Arts – Honours (English)
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November 2010

USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.

ABSTRACT

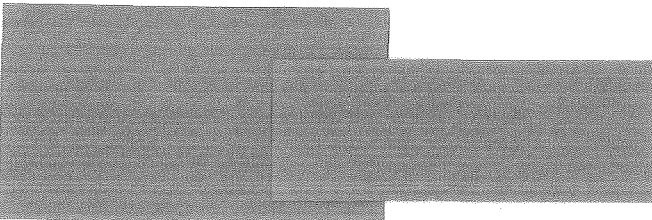
Dracula has long been associated with the repressive qualities of Victorian society and the oppression of the emerging New Woman. However, taking into account that the novel is part of the gothic genre, a genre which endeavours to infringe the social boundaries in any given era, this thesis will demonstrate an equally visible and potent transgressive feminine element playing out in *Dracula*. Using Michel Foucault's idea of discourse to show how subjects are generated, the novel can be seen as facilitating both productive and repressive ideas of femininity. Power, as it operates through discourse, tends to produce its own resistance, and so at the same time as a discourse serves to reinforce the dominant ideology, it also acts as a starting point for opposing discursive strategies. One discourse functioning in the novel is a monstrous femininity that is projected onto Lucy and the female vampires, producing their bodies as a site of contamination and danger. Operating simultaneously, though, is another representation of femininity, a type of resistance produced by the very discourses that attempted to repress Lucy and the female vampires, and label them as deviant. Through Mina and the male characters, the novel constructs a transgressive femininity, which functions to redefine and revalue notions of the feminine, thereby prising open a new discursive space in which the New Woman could develop.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

- i. incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher degree or diploma in any institution of higher education;
- ii. contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text of this thesis; or
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Sharon Kostopoulos

15 November 2010

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Finally, a huge thank you to my mum and sister, who tolerated my moodiness, brought me nourishments to keep me going, and only complained some of the time when I stared into space instead of holding a conversation with them. Their easy faith in me spurred me on from the beginning, for which I will always be grateful. A special mention to my darling nephew Brandon, whose hilarious antics constantly reminded me of the value of laughter. Thanks for keeping me relatively sane, Duckface.

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INTRODUCTION

Vampire myths and legends have been a part of folklore and literature for centuries, recorded in the histories of almost every culture from around the world, but it was Bram Stoker's gothic masterpiece *Dracula* that heavily influenced the archetypal vampire (Mersey, 2007, pp. 60-61). Stoker's creation is arguably one of the most famous monsters in literature, in fact, reaching the same near-mythical status and recognition as Mary Shelley's nameless monster and Robert Louis Stevenson's Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde creature. Since its publication in 1897, *Dracula* has continued to fascinate and frighten readers with its restrained, quiet horror. As Carol Senf (1979, p. 160) points out, not only has the story never been out of print and been translated into more than a dozen languages, it has also been the subject of more film adaptations than any other novel, firmly cementing its place upon the mantelpiece of cultural icons.

The vampire is a potent staple of the gothic genre, a genre which endeavours to transgress the social norms in any given era (Botting, 1996, p. 20). In this way, the vampire story functions as a metaphoric vocabulary to represent certain obsessions and anxieties that would be otherwise inadmissible (Heiland, 2004, p. 5). Performing within this gothic playground, and written during a time of tumultuous change in Victorian England, the rich undertones that permeate *Dracula* mirror the concerns and fears that existed in the late-Victorian period. Jeffrey Richards (1995, p. 143) explains that the atmosphere of the 1890s was affected by the decline and degeneration of the British Empire, as well as the Industrial Revolution and the problems in rapidly-expanding cities. This was an era when old certainties, boundaries, and structures were under threat, and, in some cases, breaking down. The principle anxieties circulating at the *fin de siècle* centred on the future of the Empire, the shifting of class structures, the flourishing of capitalism, and arguably the most fearful and destabilising of all, the insistent challenging of gender roles (Hopkins, 2002, p. 17).

This collision between the old and the new marked a volatile transitional period in history, with Britain caught between two ages: the Victorian and the modern. Yet it was precisely because it was the *fin de siècle* that deep concerns over the changing social

and cultural climate were also accompanied by an exhilarating sense of hope and possibility (Ledger & McCracken, 1995, pp. 1-2). It was amidst the backdrop of this environment that the topical phenomenon of the 'New Woman' was emerging and gaining voice, a movement where women began to contest oppressive understandings of female behaviour, sexuality, and domestic responsibility. Kathleen Spencer (1992, pp. 205-206) notes that the New Woman began to move away from domestic duties and sought access to higher education, employment, and other opportunities, with the most radical of the campaigners seeking sexual freedom and expression.

There are a number of authors who discuss the political and cultural horizon of the late-Victorian period, particularly in relation to women. Nina Auerbach (1982) provides an overview of the constructions of womanhood at that time, noting the repetition of the angel and the fallen woman theme to portray women. Similarly, Lynda Nead (1988) and Jill Matus (1995) offer insights into the images and definitions of womanhood, maternity, and female sexuality during the Victorian era. Nead explains that "female sexuality was organized around the dichotomy virgin/whore...and her sexual identity determined whether or not she was seen as a respectable and responsible member of society" (p. 6). Martha Vicinus (1972) focuses on Victorian feminine ideals of sexual innocence, with marriage and procreation emphasised as being a woman's sole function, while Beth Newman (2004) employs psychoanalysis and cultural history to examine ideas of Victorian feminism, exploring the social aspects of seeing and being seen as represented in the fiction of the era. Duncan Crow (1971) and Barbara Caine (1997) discuss the relationship between feminist thought and actions within the wider social and cultural changes occurring during the Victorian era, with Caine noting that since the introduction of the term 'feminism' in the 1890s, "its meanings and applications have been contentious and its use as a term often divisive and even disruptive" (p. 9).

Specifically addressing the emergence of the New Woman, Lyn Pykett (1992) traces the New Woman fiction of the late-Victorian era, revealing how the often controversial fiction put female sexuality on the literary agenda for the first time. She explains that the New Woman authors wrote of sexual behaviour with a frankness that had previously been unthinkable, and that they employed as mouthpieces women

unusually independent, intelligent, and free from convention. Other critical work on the area of the New Woman includes A.R Cunningham (1973), Elaine Showalter (1992) Sally Ledger (1995), and Francis O’Gorman (2008), who all outline the English attitudes towards sex, the body, gender, and sexuality at the end of the nineteenth century. For instance, Showalter illustrates the fears surrounding the New Woman, who supposedly “threatened to turn the world upside down and to be on top in a wild carnival of social and sexual misrule” (p. 38). Likewise, Gail Cunningham (1978) emphasises how the New Woman was becoming “a symbol of all that was most challenging and dangerous” (p. 2). What this collection of research reveals is that the New Woman was perceived as a direct threat to classic Victorian definitions of femininity, and ultimately, to the *status quo*.

In what was a part of the first wave of feminism, although it would not be identified under this banner for several years to come, the New Woman proved to be so alarming that various bodies of power united in condemning her, and in turn, celebrating the traditional Victorian woman (Spencer, 1992, p. 206). Regarded as a harbinger of negative social change, Sally Ledger (1995, p. 25) explains that the New Woman was continually attacked in the pages of the newspaper and periodical press of the 1890s, as well as in novels. It was precisely this form of public construction and regulation of bodies, albeit not specifically the status of women, that compelled French philosopher and social historian Michel Foucault to re-examine the common assumption that the Victorian age was repressive, particularly in terms of sexuality.

In his book *The history of sexuality* (1976/1990), Foucault provides an historical analysis of sexuality in relation to discourse and power, focussing on its function within the Victorian era. At the time of publication Foucault’s work was innovative, and although it was considered historical criticism, it was a catalyst for many contemporary theorists of gender. Susan Bordo (1986), Teresa de Lauretis (1987), Sandra Bartky (1988), Judith Butler (1990), Donna Haraway (1991), and Elizabeth Grosz (1994), amongst many others, have all drawn from this theory, and re-evaluated Foucault’s ideas to develop new ways of seeing, reading, and thinking about gender, female sexuality, and the female body: all themes largely neglected by Foucault in his original work.

Given Foucault only briefly mentions women in his theory, and that the New Woman phenomenon raises issues specifically related to the disempowered status of Victorian women, it may seem logical to use a specifically feminist theory, rather than Foucault, to unlock the construction of gender as relayed in *Dracula*. Yet by examining how Foucault's subjects are produced, he provides a profitable way of questioning the feminine. Where feminist theorists have tended to assume discourse is univocally masculine and 'phallogentric', Foucault distinguishes discourse, and the power attached to it, as ambiguous and elastic, belonging neither to men nor women, and capable of offering counterattacks to dominant trends (Downing, 2008, p. 104). For this reason, I believe Foucault's theory offers an ideal framework to underpin this thesis.

Some of the many authors who have written on Foucault's work include Lynda Nead (1988), David Halperin (1989), Roy Porter (1996), David Larmour, Paul Miller, and Charles Platter (1997), Jeffrey Weeks (2003), and Lisa Downing (2008). These authors argue Foucault's historical approach to sexuality was a vital contribution to the field as it questioned the very category of sexuality. They recognise that Foucault, going against so many other theorists who judged the Victorians as repressive in their attitudes to gender and sexuality, believed the Victorians discussed it extensively, and in new ways. This led to the construction of an entire scientific discourse around sex and sexuality, where unusual and unorthodox sexual practices were defined and labelled, creating a disciplinary division between the norm and the perverse. These authors also discuss Foucault's claim that sexuality is a cultural construct, which is produced by various forms of knowledge, or discourses, rather than as a result of a natural or biological imperative.

The pinnacle of Foucault's theory, however, is in his assertion that discourses can facilitate subversive possibilities, by using the discourse in ways for which it was not intended. Andrew Miller and James Adams (1996), Hans Bertens (2007), and Raymond Caldwell (2007) all comment that even within the policing of abnormal or deviant behaviour and practices, Foucault realised that labelling something as illicit actually empowered it to some extent, by making it visible and known. Applying Foucault's ideas to the position of the New Woman in the Victorian world, it becomes apparent to me that, despite the public assaults she faced in the brunt of British fears, the exposure

the New Woman received actually served to open up a new discursive space in which she could develop.

With this premise in mind, I turn my attention to *Dracula*, and to the possible interpretations of gender it suggests. There is an almost daunting amount of research and criticism written about the text, and, with the exception of Christopher Craft (1984), Marjorie Howes (1988), and Talia Schaffer (1994)—who all believe *Dracula* encompasses a reversal of gender codes, which do not correspond with biological sex and are subject to continual re-allocation—the majority of studies concur the novel is preoccupied with *restraining* the dangerous, autonomous, and sexualised woman.

Two critics who align with this postulation are Alan Johnson (1988) and John Allen Stevenson (1988), who place Stoker's novel in the context of late-century thoughts on marriage and heterosexual exogamy. Nina Auerbach (1995) argues the women's transformations into vampires articulates a more active sense of female desire than was allowed in the marital relationship, where it was tied to the duty of reproduction rather than the experience of pleasure. Phyllis Roth (1977, p. 113) follows a similar argument, believing the "hostility towards female sexuality" shown in the text, particularly the desire to destroy the threatening mother, reinforces traditional Victorian values. In a similar vein, Carrol Fry (1972) notes the connections between vampirism and female sexuality, attributing the novel's appeal to its latent sexuality as a story of pure women and fallen women. In fact, Elizabeth Signorotti (1996) believes *Dracula* is a response to the female empowerment in Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (1872), whereby Stoker repossesses the female body for the purposes of male pleasure and exchange. Unsurprisingly, Bram Dijkstra (1986) explores the nature and development of what he considers codified misogyny in *Dracula*, explaining that he sees the novel operating in "a world of women, the world of Eve, a world in which reversion and acculturation are at war" (pp. 342-343). With this statement Dijkstra implies Stoker's women replicate the threat all women supposedly propound, that at any moment she could lure man back into the pretence of paradise.

With a particular stress on the notion of the New Woman, Anne Cranny-Francis (1988), Kathleen Spencer (1992), Alison Case (1993), and Lisa Nystrom (2009) all examine

various gender issues operating in Stoker's novel. Just as Case discusses the relationship between gender and control, asserting "Stoker safeguards manliness from the threat implied in the growing recognition...[of] the phenomenon of the New Woman" (p. 239), Nystrom similarly believes the central concern which fuels *Dracula* is the fear of an independent and active woman, observing that the heroes spend more time "suppressing the rise of the 'New Woman' than fighting the title villain" (p. 75). The most elaborate literary criticism of the New Woman in relation to *Dracula*, however, is Carol Senf's publications (1979, 1982, 1998), in which she outlines the anxieties the novel expresses about gender roles. Seeing a split in his representation of women, she believes Stoker is reacting to the phenomenon of the New Woman, which is "the best of the traditional and the new" (1982, p. 49). This division of the New Woman from the traditional Victorian woman is also explored by Stephanie Demetrakopoulos (1977) and Judith Weissman (1977), who believe the novel represents the male fear of female sexually, reflective in the binary of chaste woman and sexually aggressive female vampire. They also believe the novel expresses the hidden desires of Victorian culture, particularly women's desire to be sexually alive.

The extensive research on the text suggests that Stoker uses vampirism to not only link his women to excessive sexuality, but to also brand them as the dangerous Other. Gail Griffin (1988), Judith Halberstam (1995), and Marie Mulvey-Roberts (2005, 1998) all regard Stoker's vampiric sexuality as a blend of power and femininity within the same body, marking the body as distinctly alien and therefore perverse. Similarly, Christopher Bentley (1972) and Robert Tracy (1990) focus on the sexual undertones in the sucking and the transfusing of blood, and draw attention to both the phallic symbolism and the perverted sexuality of the novel. Barbara Creed (2005, 1993) explores the function of monsters in relation to sex and gender, and suggests the identity of the monster is inseparable from questions of power and politics. She claims, "The monster disturbs identity, system, order – it does not respect borders, positions, rules" (2005, p. xviii). While Alexandra Warwick (1995) surveys vampire legends, noting that vampire fiction incorporates Victorian phobias about syphilis, Elizabeth Miller (2006) takes this one step further, asserting *Dracula* has every disagreeable sexual practice imaginable thrust upon its pages, including aggressive female sexuality, fellatio, gang rape, necrophilia, and sexually transmitted disease. It is

difficult, it seems, to refute the images of the threatening, contaminated woman in Stoker's novel.

In spite of the overwhelming consensus that Stoker's principle aim was to reinforce traditional female roles, in a bid to highlight the fears surrounding the increasingly influential New Woman, it is my belief that there is a subtler, but just as powerful, underlying message that Stoker has woven into the text. It is almost indisputable that the novel acts as a regulation to the changing role of woman at that time, yet it would be negligent to consider a gothic novel like *Dracula* as a straightforward production of normative femininity, given that the gothic is fundamentally a transgressive genre. Instead, operating simultaneously, Stoker offers a point of resistance, where all the various temptations, attractions, threats, prohibitions, and punishments that the novel portrays work together to form a new picture of normative femininity. In doing so, *Dracula* opens up a new discourse about the New Woman, one that cannot be extinguished once it has been awoken. Therefore, while I will demonstrate the overt representation of monstrous femininity displayed by Lucy and the female vampires, my thesis will argue the most potent quality is Stoker's construction of a transgressive style of femininity, in which he uses Mina and the male characters to revalue notions of the feminine.

The first chapter of my thesis will set up the theoretical foundations necessary for my analysis of *Dracula*. I will begin by developing a snapshot of the Victorian regime in which the novel was written, providing both an overview of the changing cultural and social conditions, and the impact of, and for, the New Woman. I will then outline Michel Foucault's theory in detail, unpacking his theory on sexuality, along with its relation to power and discourse. This will enable me to evaluate Foucault's claims in terms of what it unveils about the Victorians, and in turn, what it reveals about the New Woman.

Having established the theoretical component of my thesis, the second chapter will trace the ways *Dracula* positions Lucy and the female vampires as monstrous representations of femininity. One way Stoker achieves this is through the contamination of their bodies. He does this by positioning the sexualised female

characters as the infected vampiric alien, linking them with negative connotations of contaminated blood, and emphasising their vampire mouth, which has been consistently argued stands in for the derogatory image of the *vagina dentata*, surely the deadliest threat women's sexuality can posit. Stoker also elucidates monstrous femininity by emphasising the female characters' maternal dysfunction. That Lucy and the female vampires act as the threatening, predatory mother—literally consuming children as a source of nourishment—and participate in non-reproductive sex, reinforces them as a danger to the survival of the British Empire. This interpretation of *Dracula* reinforces the dominant ideas circulating during the late-Victorian era.

The final chapter of this thesis will explicate where I differ from the bulk of the material written about *Dracula*, and closely examine how Stoker establishes Mina and the male characters as performing a transgressive style of femininity. Stoker accomplishes this by offering a space in which female agency can operate. This is visible not only in Mina's intelligence and independence, but also by her ability to bring together the men in a cohesive way, and ultimately, to be the saviour of the story. Another way Stoker pushes the boundaries is evident in the fluidity of the gender constructions. This is discernible by the male characters dependence on Mina, which crumbles Victorian ideals of male independence and dominance, and reinforces Mina as a formidable woman. The boundaries are also disrupted when the male characters are linked to feminine emotions and behaviour, as well as the collapse of bodily fluids. This reading of *Dracula* symbolises the gradual disintegration of traditional Victorian ideals, and is, I hope, more sensitive to the novel's gothic genre.

FOUCAULT AND THE VICTORIANS

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the theoretical framework that will underpin my analysis of *Dracula*. The first objective is to provide an overview of the Victorian climate at the close of the nineteenth century. This will entail an account of the shifting cultural and social landscape taking shape at that time, as well as an examination of the emerging New Woman, in terms of her impact on the regime and its influence on her. The second aim of this chapter is to outline Michel Foucault's theory, explaining his notions of sexuality, and the way it relates to power and discourse. Foucault's concepts will then be applied to the Victorians, to see what it reveals about the way Victorian society functioned at that time, and to evaluate the implications for the New Woman.

The Mood of the Late-Victorians

The gothic genre continually seeks to transgress social boundaries in any given era. In this way, the longings and anxieties of societies, which would otherwise be inadmissible, are projected and played out in gothic literature in ways unlike other fictional mediums. According to Markman Ellis (2000, p. 17) and Fred Botting (1996, p. 7), the power of gothic writing is in its ability to produce, reinforce, and undermine the values of society, and for this reason, the cultural context surrounding a text needs to be considered. In *Dracula*, many of the fears and concerns that existed in the Victorian *fin de siècle* are mirrored in the novel, and thus a snapshot of the atmosphere at that time is both enlightening and necessary.

The end of the nineteenth century is perhaps best characterised as a period of rupture in the social and ideological order of British society. The mood of the 1890s was influenced not only by the degeneration of the British Empire, but also by the immense strains of industrialisation and urbanisation (Thompson, 1981, p. 189). There were concerns that the nation, both as a race and a world power, was in irretrievable decline. According to Laurel Erickson (1996, p. 10), the erosion of Britain's global influence, the

increasing unrest in British colonies, and the growing domestic uneasiness over the morality of imperialism all contributed to the deterioration of Victorian confidence.

Other anxieties the Victorians faced were a consequence of the Industrial Revolution, and subsequent urbanisation, which saw the accelerated migration of population from the country to the city. Jennifer Hedgecock (2008, p. 4) and Anthony Wohl (1983, p. 285) explain that the overcrowded cities meant people were clustered together in cramped housing conditions and filthy slums, worked long hours for low income, and faced the ravages of infectious disease and premature death. In his article discussing urban working classes during the 1890s, Eric Hopkins (2002, p. 17) argues the overpopulation also meant issues like child labour, crime, and prostitution were rampant, and along with concerns about the shifting class structures and the changing roles for women and the family, the Victorians suffered from an enormous decline in morale.

Over time, the conglomeration of these transformations and developments deeply affected the Victorians, but what was arguably of greatest concern to them was the destabilising of gender boundaries. Public debates about gender, particularly issues related to womanhood and marriage, reached a highly developed stage during the 1890s. As Jeffrey Richards (1995, p. 147) points out, it was this decade that saw the rise of feminism, although feminism was more a rebellious ideal than a movement at that time, and this period saw the emergence of the New Woman, a term coined by feminist writer, Sarah Grand, in an article she wrote in 1894 about women's inequality and their responsibilities to the nation. Historian Patrick Wolfe (1999, p. 69) notes that although women had been fighting throughout the nineteenth-century for reforms on marriage and divorce laws, and for the property rights of married women, the New Woman sought even further equality.

While it is true that by the turn of the century women were able to enter areas of work like nursing and teaching, or gain employment in jobs that would not compete with an already established male work force, such as clerical workers, Carol Senf (1998, p. 47) explains that the New Woman demanded the right to enter learned professions and new areas of work. Moreover, she wanted the right to vote, access to broader higher

education and training, opportunities for economic independence, and the right to have employment outside the home, although lower-class women had long been so employed. Elizabeth Fee (1973, p. 24) declares the New Woman also criticised marriage as being the only available choice for women, and sought alternatives to marriage and motherhood. Essentially, when the New Woman arrived on the scene, she engaged in complex negotiations for the social changes and rights of women.

It is important to note that the New Woman as a category was by no means stable or free of contradictions. The women themselves did not always agree, differing widely on their views of who the New Woman was and what she stood for. The most controversial topic, however, was the subject of sex. As Barbara Caine (1997, p. 138) points out in her book discussing feminism during the nineteenth century, where some women only desired sexual knowledge as a way to discuss such matters as contraception and venereal disease, others made more radical demands, arguing they were entitled to the same sexual freedom and expression as men. Unsurprisingly, the entry of the New Woman into the public sphere alarmed many Victorians, but it was her sexual candour that evoked the greatest anxiety.

Late nineteenth-century society defined 'normal' sexual behaviour as male-initiated intercourse, assuming women were asexual creatures who only endured sexual relations with their husbands for the sake of duty, children, and the nation (Wilson, 1997, p. 115). When the New Woman began advocating for sexual knowledge and autonomy, a stance which before that time would have been inconceivable, she provoked fears that she would rebuff marriage and motherhood. According to Sally Ledger (1995, p. 31), this assumption, that desiring sexual expression was tantamount to her rejection of marriage and motherhood, thus severing women's reproductive function, was used as ammunition against the New Woman. As a result, the New Woman was accused of assaulting the family institution and damaging moral purity.

In reaction to the threat she seemingly posed, the New Woman soon became a popular target for scathing attacks in the public arena. In her book *The 'improper' feminine*, Lyn Pykett (1992, pp. 137-138) explains there was tremendous debate about the New Woman, which was visibly played out in fiction, plays, cartoons, and in the pages of

the daily newspapers and periodical press. Along with constructing her as a sexually rampant monster, many writers were depicting the New Woman as the future mothers of a degenerate race. Nineteenth-century author Charles Harper exemplified this supposition when he warned "the New Woman, if a mother at all, will be the mother of a New Man, as different indeed, from the present race as possible...[with] the prospect of peopling the world with stunted and hydrocephalic children...and the ultimate extinction of the race" (1894, p. 27). This statement suggests that in the 'unlikely' event a New Woman decided to fulfil her role as a mother, she would taint her children with birth defects like hydrocephalic, a condition where the accumulation of fluid in the cranium causes an enlarged head, and brain deterioration (Rekate, 1999, p. 47). With comments like this continually circulating in the late-Victorian media, it is no wonder the New Woman was perceived as the fearful harbinger of detrimental social change.

It was precisely these forms of construction and regulation of bodies, as evident in the public formation of the New Woman, which compelled French philosopher and social historian Michel Foucault to revise how the Victorian regime operated, particularly in terms of sexuality. By all superficial appearances, it seems that gender roles had never been more rigid than in the late nineteenth-century, and this has certainly been the dominant assumption made by critics and historians over the years (Downing, 2008, p. 88; Weeks, 2003, p. 34; Miller & Adams, 1996, p. 1; Nead, 1988, p. 2). Yet Foucault believed there was more to see than only what was being repressed and restricted. He asserted that discourse, and the power attached to it, is not only ambiguous and elastic, belonging neither to men nor women, but also capable of offering counterattacks against the dominant trends (Porter, 1996, p. 250). What Foucault's notion opens up is the possibility of a new discursive space in which subordinate subjects, such as the New Woman, can access power.

Michel Foucault's Theory

In his book *The history of sexuality* (1976/1990), Michel Foucault provides an historical analysis of sexuality, in relation to discourse and power, and how it functioned within the Victorian era. He explains that in the Renaissance period, sex was marked by an

open and easy discourse. Unlike with the Victorians, there was little need for the secrecy or concealment of sexual behaviour, as sex was an object of pleasure and did not carry the shame it would later be tainted with (1976/1990, p. 3). Whether or not this is true, by the eighteenth century this lax discourse on sex changed and became more suppressed as a result of the controlling power of the rising bourgeoisie. According to Griselda Pollock (1994, p. 25) and Biddy Martin (1982, pp. 7-8), it is commonly presumed the bourgeoisie were responsible for repressing the Victorians' sexuality in the interests of economic productivity, as unlike the aristocracy that preceded them, it was argued the bourgeoisie valued a stern work ethic and thus disapproved of frivolous pursuits. Sex for pleasure, then, would have been viewed as an unproductive waste of energy, and consequently, an object of censure.

An outcome of this trend saw discourse on sex redirected from the public arena into the privacy of the home, and reduced to the function of reproduction between a husband and wife. The legitimate and procreative couple became the model to which the sexual norm was judged (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 3). To act outside these boundaries was prohibited, and this stance paved the way for identifying and labelling taboo behaviours. It is this view that is often associated with Victorian culture, a perspective heavily influenced by psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud, who first examined the concept of sexual repression. As Kevin Floyd (2009, p. 56) and Stephen Garton (2004, p. 10) explain, although Freud's work unsettled the Victorian centrality of reproductive sexuality, and posited sexuality as a construct rather than a pre-given natural determination, his focus was limited to what he thought the Victorians hid, evaded, and denied. For Foucault, the Victorians did not repress sexuality but instead produced it.

Unlike theorists before him, Foucault was dissatisfied with what he called the "repressive hypothesis" (1976/1990, p. 10). Roy Porter (1996, p. 249) declares that rather than seeing the Victorian age as a period of silence and suppression, Foucault describes how the subject of sex was increasingly discussed in relation to diverse aspects of social life. This proliferation of knowledge, Foucault argues, led to the construction of an entire discourse around sex and sexuality, where unusual and unorthodox sexual practices were defined and labelled, creating a classificatory and

disciplinary division between privileged society and the perverse (Downing, 2008, p. 88). Never before had social subjects been so exhorted to produce discourse about sexual behaviours. This does not suggest it was a regime of sexual liberation, nor does it suggest a society more tolerant than repressive, but for the first time the Victorians discussed and classified the very category of sexuality, thereby producing new and proliferating sexual identities (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 10).

The concept of discourse was important to Foucault as he believed it is in discourse that power and knowledge are joined. For Foucault, a given discourse, such as sex in the nineteenth-century, establishes a field within which propositions about sexuality can be formulated. It is a society's acceptance of the claims to knowledge that the discourse produces that gives discourse its power. As Foucault reiterates, discourses are firmly implicated in the mechanisms of power and the exercise of power relations (1976/1990, p. 92). To illustrate this point, Foucault asserts that repression is itself a form of discourse. Where other theorists, including Freud, have developed whole frameworks outlining the ways in which the bourgeoisie repressed Victorian sexual impulses, Lynda Nead (1988, p. 3) points out that Foucault built upon this knowledge, realising the repressive hypothesis was only one form of discourse in which power operated in that society. There was, in fact, an explosion of discourses about sex circulating during the Victorian regime (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 100).

Power relations to Foucault are central to the analysis of any society, and he is quick to note that what he means by power is not necessarily what is ordinarily meant by the word. He clarifies that his definition of power is something ubiquitous, and should not be thought of as dual, as creating a division between those dominating and those being dominated, as in institutions over the citizens of a state (1976/1990, p. 92). For Foucault, power is not simply a repressive force, belonging to some and not others, but rather as a relational force, functioning at all times within all interactions with others. Given that power exists in every relation, subservience or silence, for instance, does not signify a lack of power so much as a different manifestation of power (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 92). This is not to suggest some groups are not privileged by their position, but it argues against simplistic structural models, such as holding men responsible for repressing women. Foucault helps us to move from identifying the deployment of

sexuality in terms of coercion, which emphasises domination and victimisation, to an understanding of the productive role of power (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 99).

Foucault considered sexuality to be an historical construct, which enters subjects subliminally through a long sequence of power relations. He goes on to explain that the concept of sexuality should not be understood as a product of nature or a biological imperative. That is, it is not the instincts or act of sexual intercourse, nor is it the sex organs, but rather, what defines sexuality is the array of discourses informing us what to believe, feel, and act out (Foucault, 1976/1990, pp. 105-106). Consequently, as Lisa Downing (2008, p. 89) explicates, there is an element of social control in this construction of sexuality, with these myths serving a classificatory and normalising purpose. Yet Foucault infers that as we are all producing our gender as well as being produced as gendered subjects, we also have the power to produce a gendered identity differently (duBois, 1998, p. 96). He argues for the power of resistance, positing that discourses “also made possible the formation of a ‘reverse’ discourse” (1976/1990, p. 101). In this way, even with the policing of abnormal or deviant behaviours, the very act of labelling something as illicit actually exposes it, making it visible and known, and in turn, it offers the power to voice dissent.

The pinnacle of Foucault’s theory is his assertion that discourses can facilitate subversive possibilities by using the discourse in ways for which it was not intended. Subjects can come to be involved in interpreting and responding to regulative power, but it does not mean they will obey the pressures for normalisation. For instance, acts or behaviours deemed illicit by dominant discourse are transformed into new discursive codes, enabling resistance against normality (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 18). Encapsulating this point, Foucault asserts that “where there is power there is resistance” (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 95). It seems power is not something we can simply accept or reject, he argues, although we can choose whether to use it to compel or to resist (Downing, 2008, p. 90). Power, as it operates through discourse, tends to produce its own resistance. In fact, Foucault suggests power is as productive as it is repressive. In this way, discourse can be both an instrument of power and a point of resistance for an opposing strategy (Foucault, 1976/1990, p. 101).

A Fresh Glance at the Victorians

Using Foucault's theory, it is possible to evaluate the implications for the Victorians at the close of the nineteenth-century, and more specifically, for the New Woman. As argued, one of the effects of Foucault's historical approach to sexuality is to see power as a productive force rather than simply as negative or repressive. By dislodging the conventional view of Victorian morality, Foucault expands the field of critical analysis, offering an alternate, flexible way of understanding the New Woman. The multiple discourses on sexuality in the 1890s was the result of a desire to control the Victorian subjects, but at the same time these operated, they also acted as a point of resistance and starting point for opposing discursive strategies. In this way, the series of public attacks the New Woman faced, as a result of British fears, effectively prised open a discursive space for her in which she could develop.

To return to *Dracula*, and what this theoretical background implies for the text, it seems Foucault's idea of discourse as productive encourages a redefinition of the productive capacities of literature. As Audrey Jaffe (2002, p. 433) points out, Foucault sees literature as a form of cultural production, as an institution involved in the construction and perpetuation of ideologies. Just like other institutions, literature can repress and produce subjectivities, and in so doing, become a form of knowledge informed by discourse. That literature is such a powerful mode for promoting or dissuading a particular discourse is an important factor to consider when scrutinising the construction of femininity in *Dracula*.

In examining Stoker's text, then, it is difficult to overlook the overt representations of monstrous femininity in it. This suggests Stoker was reinforcing the dominant discourses surrounding Victorian women at that time. Yet if we employ Foucault's notions, and remember that *Dracula* is a gothic text, and as such, subject to plays of ambivalence and transgressions that can restore and challenge boundaries, other possible interpretations become apparent. It is my belief that at the same time as Stoker's text reinforces conservative Victorian ideals it also contests these boundaries. In fact, my thesis will argue the most powerful quality of *Dracula* is the transgressive

style of femininity exhibited, which opens a new space for female agency to operate, and redefines the idea of femininity.

MONSTROUS FEMININITY

The first chapter developed the theoretical framework necessary to underpin this analysis of *Dracula*. The initial objective was to provide a snapshot of the late-Victorian regime, giving an account of the shifting social and cultural landscape taking shape at that time, and of the emerging New Woman. The next goal was to outline Michel Foucault's notions of sexuality, and the way it relates to power and discourse. This led to a brief evaluation of Foucault's claims, in terms of what it unveils about the way Victorian society functioned at the close of the nineteenth-century, and what the implications were for the New Woman.

Building upon the theoretical foundation, this chapter will demonstrate one way femininity is constructed in *Dracula*: as a monstrous style of femininity. With this focus, Stoker's novel can be read as a reactionary response to the threat autonomous female sexuality posed through the phenomenon of the New Woman, with late-Victorian anxieties about female sexual desire manifesting most visibly in Lucy and the female vampires. Stoker positions them as the epitome of the sexualised woman, and accordingly, their bodies are produced as a site of contamination and danger. He marks the female characters as the infected vampire alien, linking them with negative connotations of contaminated blood, and emphasises the deadly threat of their vampire mouths. Stoker also elucidates monstrous femininity by highlighting the maternal dysfunction Lucy and the female vampires' exhibit. With their explicit sexuality, the female characters signify the consequences of women straying from their prescribed role of mother and wife. That Lucy and the female vampires behave as the threatening, predatory mother, literally consuming children as a source of nourishment, and by their participation in non-reproductive sex, reinforces them as a danger to the survival of the British Empire.

Contamination of the Body

As the nineteenth-century progressed towards its close, debates about the degeneration of Britain's culture and the moral fibre of the nation increased and became more urgent. In an attempt to diagnose the sense of doom and decline spreading through the empire, the Victorians used medical and scientific investigations to identify individuals or types who could be said to be responsible for 'infecting' the nation. According to Lynda Nead (1988, p. 3), in her book analysing the regulation of women's behaviour in the nineteenth-century, these investigations centred on classifying and naming all that was degenerate in society, and thereby labelling what was considered alien or Other. Under the guise of protecting the family, society, and race, women's bodies and their sexuality were integrated into the sphere of medical practise, and with this move, the medical profession sought control over female bodies (Stott, 1992, p. 25). Obsessed with defining normal and abnormal sexualities, the medical authorities condemned those women who slipped outside the boundaries as unclean, and instigators of corruption.

Within this climate, the New Woman, who challenged the traditional role of women as wife and mother, and instead sought opportunities for self-development outside of marriage, came to be seen as damaging to the family and to moral purity. Linda Dowling explains that the opponents of the New Woman described her in the vocabulary of insurrection and apocalypse, as one who had "ranged herself perversely with the forces of cultural anarchism and decay precisely because she wanted to reinterpret the sexual relationship" (1979, pp. 440-441). It is unsurprising, then, that the New Woman, with her desire for sexual independence, became an emblem for the decay of traditional Victorian values and the degeneration of the race (Noble, 1895, p. 490). This sentiment is reflected in *Dracula*, where the relationship between female sexuality and disease is central, and the female body is increasingly seen as a source of danger.

Writing the novel at the height of these fears, Stoker employs the vampire from the gothic stable to symbolise the ramifications of female sexual freedom. He produces vampirism as a form of infection which sexualises the female characters, and in doing

so, contaminates their bodies. In fact, the novel is full of references to suggest vampirism, and hence female sexuality, resembles a contagious disease, namely syphilis, which will be discussed in detail shortly. In his article analysing the Victorians' preoccupation with sex and death, Robert Tracy (1990, p. 40) asserts the vampire trope not only signifies excess sexuality, it is also encoded with notions of mortality, surely the severest consequence for the diseased body. By connecting vampirism and unbridled female sexuality in this way, Stoker creates the ultimate manifestation of monstrous femininity. When he ascribes visible signs that the bodies of the female characters are contaminated, Stoker ensures the reader recognises them as distinctly alien, and therefore a threat to society.

In the novel, Lucy first bears the degenerative stamp of the infected woman when she mentions her desire to marry three men. In a shocking admission she questions "Why can't they let a girl marry three men, or as many as want her, and save all this trouble?" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 67). The explicit meaning is that Lucy would like to be kind to these three fine men who have proposed to her, yet there is also an implication that she not only desires all three men, but can handle three men sexually. Although Lucy is not overtly sexual until she has succumbed to vampirism, her instincts here reveal her sexuality is on the verge of satisfying its appetites. After Dracula's first attack on Lucy, Mina observes Lucy's "lips were parted, and she was breathing—not softly, as usual with her, but in long, heavy gasps, as though striving to get her lungs full at every breath" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 102). In what is suggestively a post-sexual encounter, it seems Lucy is excited by Dracula and his promise of sexual fulfilment from the moment she encounters him. In fact, as is evident in her attraction to the three men and her immediate reaction to Dracula's touch, Lucy's vulnerability to the temptations of the flesh is likely what made her susceptible to vampirism to begin with.

Having revealed her sexual appetite, Stoker treats Lucy's sexual desire in terms of a contagion, analogous to the problem frequently accompanying promiscuity: venereal disease. He draws on the late-Victorian fear of syphilis, a disease common in the period and likely the cause of Stoker's own death, according to his biographer and grand

nephew, Daniel Farson¹ (Davis, 1993, p. 22). Without speculating whether or not Stoker was aware of having the disease at the time he wrote the book, Jeffrey Spear (1993, p. 191) explains how the medical literature at that time considered syphilis a physical manifestation of an immoral tendency. As there was no blood test for syphilis until the Wasserman test in 1906, any diagnosis was reliant on observation. In her article about vampire fiction and its links to Victorian phobias of syphilis, Alexandra Warwick notes that the ability to identify the disease through observation alone is replicated by Stoker, who produces his "own taxonomy: sharp teeth, red mouths, emaciation, and pallor" (1995, p. 209). By visibly tainting the bodies of Lucy and the female vampires with images like these, Stoker reinforces their syphilis-like infection and alludes to their immoral propensity.

As Lucy's vampirism gains in strength, her degenerative infection begins to alter her physical condition. On several occasions Dr. Seward observes her decline, saying Lucy was "ghastly, chalkily pale; the red seemed to have gone from even her lips and gums, and the bones of her face stood out prominently" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 130). Dr. Seward continues to describe her "pale gums, drawn back, made the teeth look longer and sharper" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 172), and later, even her "gums seemed to have shrunk back from the teeth, as we sometimes see in a corpse after a prolonged illness" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 137). Just like the putrefying of the body associated with syphilis, Lucy's vampiric infection festers until eventually her body is no longer recognisable as her own. Dr. Seward contemplates how Lucy had changed, that her "sweetness was turned to adamant, heartless cruelty, and the purity to voluptuous wantonness...we could see that the lips were crimson with fresh blood, and that the stream had trickled over her chin and stained the purity of her lawn death-robe" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 225). In earlier scenes Lucy is clothed in white, so this image of Lucy, with her stained robe, strongly suggests the loss of her purity. What further cements Lucy's status as contaminated is that these signs of disease have been observed by a doctor, and at the turn of the century, the authority of a medical professional was almost indisputable (Warwick, 1995, p. 209).

¹ In *The man who wrote Dracula: A biography of Bram Stoker* (1975), Farson claims Stoker died of tertiary syphilis because his death certificate lists "Locomotor Ataxy" among the causes of death. However, as Stoker suffered several strokes before his death, whose symptoms may have been confused with those of "Locomotor Ataxy", there is some uncertainty.

To further contaminate the bodies of Lucy and the female vampires, Stoker draws on connotations of tainted blood. According to Gail Griffin (1998, p. 141), the female blood motif has long been associated with two significant events in a woman's life: the loss of virginity and menstruation. In both instances the shedding of blood is linked with sexuality, and notions of defilement and impurity. Simone de Beauvoir sums this up when she asserts, "on the day she can reproduce, a woman becomes impure; and rigorous taboos surround the menstruating female" (1949, p. 180). Far from being merely unclean, the alleged toxicity of female blood signifies danger. In 1878, less than twenty years before *Dracula* appeared, the *British Medical Journal* asserted "it is an undoubted fact that meat spoils when touched by menstruating women" (cited in de Beauvoir, 1949, p. 181). Furthermore, as Bram Dijkstra points out in his book *Idols of perversity* (1986, p. 347), it was once believed that if a woman tasted blood she might transform from an innocent, inexperienced woman into an insatiable nymphomaniac. Just as female blood has been associated with depravity, filth, and excess sexuality, Stoker's emphasis of bad blood in the female characters reinforces how diseased and dangerous they are.

Blood symbolises many things in the novel, but above all, it is used to signify the degenerate condition of the female body. Before the men are aware Lucy has been infected with vampirism, they realise she is suffering some life-threatening disease, and attempt to cure her by performing multiple blood transfusions on her. However, as Jennifer Wicke (1992, p. 479) has persuasively argued, there is a sexual undercurrent in the blood circulations, where vampire blood is a symbol for life-giving liquid—semen—and so the blood transfusions imply a different meaning. Van Helsing recognises that the blood transfusions are sexual, and as Lucy undergoes the process several times, always with different men, it implies a kind of promiscuity in her. He exclaims, "Ho, ho! Then this so sweet maid is a polyandrist, and me, with my poor wife dead to me, but alive by Church's law, though no wits, all gone—even I, who am faithful husband to this now-no-wife, am bigamist" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 187). With this comment, Van Helsing confirms that the transfusions were indeed adulterous, as does his warning not to tell Arthur that anyone else has given Lucy blood, in case he becomes jealous. Once ignited, Lucy's sexual appetite is insatiable, with her diseased vampire state resembling a kind of nymphomania. After months of sexual encounters,

Lucy admits to Mina, "I have an appetite like a cormorant, am full of life, and sleep well" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 117). Although her sexual needs are finally being met, Lucy's desires are so excessive that they can only temporarily be sated, as her sexual hunger continues to grow. Evidently, as the injecting of the men's blood answers Lucy's call for sexual activity, it also intensifies her threat towards them.

As if Lucy's diseased body is not destructive enough, Stoker heightens the horror of her contamination when her vampirism begins attacking the innocent men. According to Elaine Showalter (1991, p. 180) and Daniel Pick (1988, p. 73), just as the vampire drains the blood of its victim, in *Dracula* the sexual woman drains the vitality of her male partner. After she has been given a blood transfusion, Lucy leaves each of the men limp and fatigued. After one such donation, Dr. Seward is advised to give Arthur some "of the port of wine, and let him lie down a while. He must then go home and rest, sleep much and eat much, that he may be recruited of what he has given his love" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 133). It seems that having exchanged bodily fluids with Lucy's tainted body, Arthur is now showing signs of deterioration. To further segregate Lucy's dangerous blood, Stoker establishes a binary opposition between the pure blood of the men and the infected blood of the sexual woman. As Lucy's pale, nearly lifeless body awaits a blood transfusion, Van Helsing praises Arthur's virility, saying "He is so young and strong and of blood so pure that we need not defibrinate it" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 133). To defibrinate is to remove fibrin from the blood, a process used to purify red blood cells (Hindle, 2003, p. 446). That Arthur's blood is healthy enough not to require cleansing functions as a reminder of Lucy's sickly blood. After all, as Van Helsing reminds us, "A brave man's blood is the best thing on this earth when a woman is in trouble" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 160). Portraying the female characters in this manner, by connecting female blood, excess sexuality, and the contaminated body, Stoker fashions them as a parasitic threat.

Having ascribed the female characters an infected vampiric body, and filled it with contaminated blood, Stoker completes his monstrous creation by emphasising their vampire mouth. In this way, the vampire is reduced to images of her mouth—her scarlet lips, sharp teeth, and red tongues—while the rest of her almost disappears from the description. By luring in its victims with its inviting mouth, the female vampire

poses tremendous danger by offering temptation. Upon meeting the female vampires, Harker admits "All three had brilliant white teeth, that shone like pearls against the ruby of their voluptuous lips. There was something about them that made me uneasy, some longing and at the same time some deadly fear" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 45). The passage resonates with Harker's fear of contagion, a fear made more horrifying by the fact that these sexually voracious vampires are desirable to him. What the vampire mouth also suggests, more importantly, is a variation of the derogatory image of the mythical *vagina dentata*.

The *vagina dentata*, or toothed vagina, signifies the deadliest threat female sexuality can posit. The idea of the female vampire symbolising the lethal vagina with teeth is given credit by Harker when he describes their mouths as dripping with "moisture shining on the scarlet lips and on the red tongue as it lapped the white sharp teeth" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 45). The *vagina dentata* is a terrifying symbol of woman as the mouth of hell, of a black hole which threatens to castrate men. In addition to threatening to engulf men, the *vagina dentata* also signifies the deceitful nature of the sexual woman (Creed, 1993, p. 106). As Harker discovers at Dracula's castle, the female vampires entice him with promises of rapture in order to ensnare him. Despite his "burning desire that they would kiss me with those red lips" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 45), Harker is astute enough to realise their imminent threat, observing one female vampire as she "licked her lips like an animal...I could hear the churning of her tongue as it licked her teeth and lips" (p. 45). What Harker initially mistakes as the movement of her mouth for erotic promise is actually the female vampire licking her lips, her mouth salivating in preparation for her meal. As Marie Mulvey-Roberts (1998, p. 81) declares, this scene is suggestive of the alluring but deadly *vagina dentata* and that Harker is risking death, or castration, by having oral contact with her.

Stoker extends the image of the *vagina dentata* when he likens Lucy to the figurehead of destructive female sexuality, Medusa. In her book outlining the various constructions of female monstrosity, Barbara Creed explains that Medusa is "regarded by historians of myth as a particularly nasty version of the *vagina dentata*" (1993, p. 111). The biting teeth of the *vagina dentata*, with its voluminous mouth and pointed fangs, are akin to the fangs of a snake, thus with her head full of writhing snakes, Medusa's entire

countenance is saturated with images of the toothed vagina, poised and waiting to strike. As outlined by mythological experts Thomas Bulfinch (2000, p. 93) and David Leeming (1990, p. 274), Medusa, one of the monstrous females known as the Gorgons, is most famous for inspiring morbid dread with her ability to turn people to stone simply by gazing upon them. After Lucy's attempt to entice Arthur into a deadly embrace is thwarted, her ensuing anger is of 'gorgonesque' proportions, where her "eyes seemed to throw out sparks of hell-fire, the brows were wrinkled as though the folds of the flesh were the coils of Medusa's snakes...If ever a face meant death – if looks could kill – we saw it at that moment" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 226). With her castrating mouth, death could have been Arthur's fate if he had succumbed to Lucy's seductive offer. It cannot be coincidental that, after comparing her to Medusa, the men fill in the cavity of Lucy's "lovely, blood-stained mouth" before chopping off her head, Perseus-like (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 226). In this way, the severed head can be seen as a method of controlling the sexualised woman, by separating her mind from her body. It seems fitting, then, that the contaminated and dangerous bodies of Lucy and the female vampires must share a similar fate to Medusa, who represents all that is deviant.

Maternal Dysfunction

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the Victorians were haunted by fears of cultural degeneration, and preoccupied with the moral purity of the nation. The New Woman, armed with her sexual candour and fight for equality, became one of the token figures for all that was in decline. Primarily, the concerns centred on the future of the English nation, and as women were the child bearers, the New Woman was regarded as a disruption to woman's natural role and a threat to the survival of the race. As Kathleen Spencer explains in her article exploring notions of purity and danger in *Dracula* (1992, pp. 205-206), to the Victorians, a woman who denies her traditional role as wife and mother is tantamount to one who denies her womanhood. Spencer confirms even the medical professionals agreed that just as the physical distinctions between men and women were absolute, there was also a difference in their natural essence (1992, p. 205). They reasoned it was therefore in a woman's nature to be the guardian of the family. In what were supposedly scientific writings, influential nineteenth-century

doctors like William Acton flatly stated "The best mothers, wives and managers of households, know little or nothing of sexual indulgences. Love of home, children and domestic duties are the only passions they feel" (cited in McIntosh, 1978, p. 56). Evidently, female sexuality at that time was perceived to have only one legitimate function, and that is for procreation within the bounds of marriage.

In *Dracula*, Stoker explores this theme by suggesting women, once separated from the function of wife and mother, evolve into a monstrous kind of femininity. This scenario is played out with Lucy and the female vampires, who express feelings of sexual desire and a disinclination for the constraints of marriage and motherhood. As Barbara Almond (2007, p. 225) and Lisa Hopkins (1997, p. 8) recognise, once the female characters are infected with vampirism, and their contaminated bodies have been fed by the blood of the men, they become the emblem of monstrous femininity and reject their prescribed role as nurturing mother. It appears their voracious sexual desires have completely polluted their femininity, and as a result, they have lost all maternal feeling. Worse, what the female characters have transformed into is the ultimate threat to the endurance of the nation: the child-killer. These women, who society designated to be the protector of children, have instead become their predator. What heightens this depiction is that Stoker ensures no male vampire is seen to touch or hurt the children. Consequently, it is not simply because they are vampires that the female characters commit their atrocious acts against children, it is also due to their distorted and 'unnatural' position as uncontrolled sexual women.

The first sign of these corrupted maternal instincts occurs early in the novel with the female vampires. In response to their demand for food, the female vampires are given a sack, which they fall upon greedily. From within the sack Harker hears "a gasp and a low wail, as of a half-smothered child. The women closed round, whilst I was aghast with horror; but as I looked they disappeared, and with them the dreadful bag" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 47). Although the female vampires do not directly harm Harker, their treatment of the child compels him to conclude they are not women at all, believing instead "They are devils of the Pit" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 61). The callousness of their action is reinforced when the baby's mother arrives the next day, demanding her child's return. Witnessing the agonising cries of the mother as she yells for her

child, Harker observes how she “abandoned herself to all the violences of extreme emotion” (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 53). In this scene, the desperation of the mother exemplifies how a woman should be, pleading for the safety of her child, which is opposite to the horrific behaviour shown by the female vampires. After Dracula summons a wolf-pack which tears the woman to pieces, Harker admits, “I could not pity her, for I knew now what had become of her child, and she was better dead” (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 54). Harker’s comment highlights that the value of the woman resides in her maternal function. Having lost the ability to perform this function, through the loss of her child, it is necessary that the woman be removed. After all, the female vampires illustrate the dire consequences when a woman is unable to fulfil her motherly duties.

After her transformation, Lucy also preys on small children, both for nourishment and for the purpose of propagating vampires. The scene at the tomb makes clear that Lucy is indeed the mysterious “bloofer lady” who has been luring children away and draining their blood (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 189). Like the female vampires, Lucy has become a monstrous mother, drawing nourishment from children instead of providing them with nutrients from her body, as a traditional maternal role would stipulate. Lucy’s dietary indiscretions evoke the deepest horror from the men as they watch her arrive fresh from the hunt, and “With a careless motion, she flung to the ground, callous as a devil, the child that up to now she had clutched strenuously to her breast, growling over it as a dog growls over a bone” (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 226). Lucy is no longer recognisable to the men, as she now displays cruel and even animalistic behaviour towards children, who have been reduced to nothing more than food to her. Dr. Seward goes on to describe how the “cold-bloodedness in the act which wrung a groan from Arthur; when she advanced to him with outstretched arms and a wanton smile, he fell back and hid his face in his hands” (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 226). Arthur is utterly repelled by Lucy’s actions, as all the men are, and so what is witnessed here is the idea of maternity perverted by unbound female sexuality, an idea thoroughly horrifying to the Victorians. Essentially, this scene is the culmination of Lucy’s decline, where she has become a perversion of the two female virtues valued most in Victorian society: maternalism and sexual purity (Demetrakopoulos, 1977, p. 107). The

aggressive sexuality and brutality Lucy shows towards the child is indicative of the monstrous outlaw she has become.

Stoker not only corrupts the female characters maternal function, he also uses their dysfunction to address another related concern during the 1890s: the declining fertility rate of the nation. The rapidly diminishing birth-rate was a highly publicised affair, and attracted intense scrutinising about female sexuality and reproduction habits (Soloway, 1990, p. 4). In *Dracula*, as Lucy and the female vampires participate in non-reproductive sex, they symbolise the ultimate threat to the survival of the nation. In his article examining the vampire myth, James Twitchell discusses how the vampiric tradition of blood-sucking is symbolic of the exchange of bodily fluids during sex, that is, that vampire sex "is sex without genitalia...sex without responsibility" (1988, p. 112). With blood sucking acting as a metaphor for sexual intercourse, there is an implication that the fangs of the female vampire are in fact a substitution of the male phallus, which the female characters use to penetrate the male's neck (Whitnall, 2009, p. 92). In this manner, the sexual acts that take place are only ever for nutritional or pleasure purposes, and never for the possibility of procreation. In fact, vampire sex takes life rather than produces it, as the vampire method of propagation is to transform the victim into a vampire. Thus, Lucy and the female vampires not only fail in their role as child bearers of the next generation, they also reduce the population every time they infect another person with vampirism. In this way, the bodies of the female characters are so tainted they are guilty of non-reproductive sex as well as non-sexual reproduction.

Cathartic Expulsion

By the conclusion of the novel, the detriment and danger unleashed by Lucy and female vampires is so excessive that Stoker must cleanse their bodies, and restore them to the more palatable role of sexually passive women. Throughout the novel Lucy and the female vampires are unresponsive to the men's strategies for social and sexual purity, so Stoker invokes a form of cathartic expulsion to expel the vampiric invader of the female bodies. Ironically, the form this expulsion takes is saturated in sexual innuendo. Entering Lucy's tomb, the men carry candles in which "the sperm dropped

in white patches which congealed" on the coffin plate bearing Lucy's name (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 210). Even knowing that sperm is short for the spermaceti used in making candle wax, the sexual overtones are a vivid prelude of things to come (Bloom, 2010, p. 2). As Arthur strikes at Lucy, she is even more sexually alive in the coffin, evident when her "body shook and quivered and twisted in violent contortions" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 230). Before she can perform any other sexually suggestive gyrations, Arthur's "untrembling arm rose and fell, driving deeper and deeper the mercy-bearing stake" into her breast (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 230). The sexual implications are embarrassingly clear, and with the men surrounding Arthur as he pounds his phallic-like stake into Lucy, the scene also suggests gang rape. This sexually violent correction of monstrous femininity permanently exorcises the threat of Lucy's hungering female sexuality.

As fits their sexually aggressive behaviour, the ritual to restore purity to the female vampires, like Lucy's earlier, is depicted in graphic and sexual terms. Van Helsing is almost caught by their sexual allure as he hunts them down, claiming their beauty evoked "the very instinct of man in me, which calls some of my sex to love" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 394). Yet this is a man charged with saving a nation from degeneration, with protecting society from the very danger he must himself resist. Thrusting a stake through their hearts, Van Helsing describes "the horrid screeching as the stake drove home; the plunging of writhing form, and lips of bloody foam" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 395). Again, it is difficult not to conjure sexual imagery in this scene. Once these expulsions have been performed on their bodies, Lucy and the female vampires are no longer the threatening and seductive monsters intent on infecting the nation with their vampiric disease. In fact, as each of their bodies "began to melt away and crumble into its native dust" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 395), the female vampires are so completely cleansed that no promiscuity lingers even in decay.

In this reading of *Dracula*, the novel is quintessentially Victorian, where one of the worst horrors the period can imagine is the sexually aggressive woman. Emerging as moral redeemers, the men are shown to have succeeded in combating one of the most feared degeneracy threats of the *fin de siècle*: the emerging sexually-liberated woman. In a period obsessed with female bodies and sexuality, Stoker uses the monstrous Other—

the vampire—to first illustrate the deadly threat posed by excess female sexually, before reclaiming the contaminated and dysfunctional bodies of Lucy and the female vampires, in a bid to save the nation. With this focus Stoker preserves the ideal of the traditional family-centred society, where female sexual promiscuity, that is, a monstrous style of femininity, must be eradicated. Of course, as indicated by Foucault's concepts outlined in the last chapter, this is only one way of interpreting the text, a demonstration of only one discourse of femininity operating within the novel. There are other discourses at play in *Dracula*, or rather the repressive discourse seen in this chapter allows for the production of a type of resistance, and this transgressive style of femininity will be examined in the next chapter.

TRANSGRESSIVE FEMININITY

The last chapter demonstrated the ways Stoker projects a monstrous style of femininity onto Lucy and the female vampires. In positioning them as sexually aggressive women, he constructs their bodies as a site of contamination and danger. Stoker marks these female characters as the infected vampire, filling their bodies with negative connotations of female blood, and emphasising the deadly threat of their vampiric mouths. He also depicts monstrous femininity by highlighting the maternal dysfunction Lucy and the female vampires' exhibit. As a result of their sexual promiscuity, these female characters abandon their traditional role of mother and wife, which transforms them into the predatory mother who consumes children as a source of nourishment. Coupled with their participation in non-reproductive sex, Lucy and the female vampires are the ultimate threat to the survival of the nation. This reading of *Dracula* reinforces the dominant discourses circulating during the late-Victorian era, and reflects the majority of criticism written about the construction of femininity in the novel.

This chapter will defer from the popular approach, and demonstrate another mode of femininity operating within *Dracula*. Stoker produces a transgressive style of femininity through Mina and the male characters, which contests the boundaries of Victorian society. One way he accomplishes this is by offering a space in which female agency can perform. This is visible in Mina's intelligence and independence, as well as her ability to bring together the men in a cohesive way. Ultimately, it is Mina who is the saviour in the story. Another way Stoker produces resistance to traditional roles is visible in the fluidity of the gender constructions. This is evident by the male characters' dependence on Mina, which disintegrates classic Victorian ideals of male independence and dominance, and cements her position as a formidable woman. Moreover, attributing feminine emotions and behaviours to the male characters, coupled with the collapse of bodily fluids, serves to create further gender slippages.

This reading of *Dracula*, a type of resistance *produced* by the very discourses that attempted to repress the New Woman, acts as a challenge to the dominant ideas of femininity in the Victorian regime.

Space for Female Agency to Perform

Given the observations about the Victorians and the New Woman that have been established thus far, it seems logical to assume Stoker was following the dominant ideas circulating when he wrote his novel. In fact, it is almost indisputable that *Dracula* acts as a regulation of the changing role of women at that time, as has been argued in the previous chapter. Yet Foucault's theory on sexuality reminds us that discourse, and the power attached to it, is ambiguous and flexible, and therefore capable of offering counterattacks to dominant trends. Furthermore, the novel is a gothic text, and as was established in the first chapter, the gothic genre is synonymous with plays of ambivalence and transgressions of social norms. For these reasons it is negligent to consider *Dracula* as only a production of normative femininity. Operating simultaneously within the text, Stoker constructs a transgressive style of femininity which offers a point of resistance to the dominant Victorian ideology of the time. One way Stoker accomplishes this is by prising open a space for female agency to operate.

As one of the most widely and loudly discussed subjects in the late nineteenth-century, Stoker would certainly have been familiar with the New Woman phenomenon, but he also had a more intimate connection to the women's movement through his mother, Charlotte Stoker. As Alan Johnson (1984, p. 22) explains in his article outlining the status of women in *Dracula*, Stoker's mother was a feminist and active in social welfare, publicly espousing votes for women and championing women's rights through campaigns and writings on the subject. With this background, it is unsurprising that Stoker explores several of the issues associated with women's struggle for equality, and it is in Mina that he incorporates many of the qualities and ambitions of the New Woman. Although she does not share the aggressive sexuality of the other female characters, undoubtedly the most controversial trait connected to the New Woman, Mina's apparent intelligence and capacity for independent action and judgement positively mark her as a modern woman.

From the onset of the story Mina is a self-supporting professional, with no family ties and in the process of learning typing and shorthand, connecting her to the New Woman who wanted greater freedom and opportunities opened to women. In a letter to Lucy, Mina explains that although the "life of an assistant schoolmistress is sometimes trying," she has "been working very hard lately...practising shorthand very assiduously" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 62). Mina's eagerness to improve her condition by learning new skills is indicative of her aspirations and independence, an uncommon status for women at that time. Moreover, the value of her capabilities is illustrated when Harker is forced by Dracula to write letters home, and Harker remarks "Mina's is in shorthand...Should the letters not carry, then the Count [Dracula] shall not yet know my secret or the extent of my knowledge" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 50). Harker's ability to covertly warn Mina about the danger he faces at Dracula's Castle, without the risk of Dracula deciphering the message if intercepted, would not have been possible if Mina was unable to read shorthand. Mina's assets are so unique for a Victorian woman that Van Helsing is compelled to point out that she has a "good memory for facts, for details", although it "is not always so with young ladies" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 195). Despite such skills increasingly becoming acceptable for women to acquire by the end of the nineteenth-century, Jennifer Fleissner (2000, p. 419) declares that it was still a controversial topic, as women were considered more suited to domestic duties. Bearing this in mind, Mina's declaration that when she marries Harker "I shall be useful to Jonathan [Harker], and if I can stenograph well enough I can take down what he wants to say in this way and write it out for him on the typewriter" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 62), is an imperative statement. That Mina is self-sufficient and able to use her talents to support her husband, other than through a domestic role, ensures Mina's New Womanly qualities are affirmed.

To strengthen Mina's affiliation with the modern woman, Stoker aligns her with the New Woman, whom Mina refers to twice in her journal entry. According to Gail Cunningham (1978, p. 2) in her book analysing the New Woman debates, one of the ways the progressive woman asserted her independence was through physical activities, such as bicycle riding, playing tennis, and long-distance walking. In *Dracula*, when Mina and Lucy stop for tea after partaking in a vigorously long walk, and Mina comments, "I believe we should have shocked the 'New Woman' with our appetites"

(Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 99), we witness a sign of her assertiveness as a liberated woman. Mina not only displays her mobility with her physical activity, she also admits she ate as much food as she felt like. Feminist philosopher Susan Bordo (1998, p. 19), who specialises in culture and its relation to the body, points out this act defies the Victorian idea that women should only consume tiny portions of food so as to maintain their thin figures. Mina's words, then, hint at the depth of her transgressive appetite. A few lines later Mina suggestively remarks, "Some of the 'New Women' writers will some day start an idea that men and women should be allowed to see each other asleep before proposing or accepting" (Stoker, 1897/2003, pp. 99-100). With traditional Victorian morality dictating unmarried men and women only see each other in controlled and chaperoned settings, the notion that they should view one other asleep is particularly risqué, further cementing her as a contemporary woman (Mitchell, 1996, p. 151). Mina follows this suggestive declaration by saying "But I suppose the 'New Woman' won't condescend in future to accept; she will do the proposing herself. And a nice job she will make of it, too!" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 100). The idea that women should do the proposing is unconventional for the time period, further establishing Mina's modernity, yet the statement also indicates her acceptance of initiative in woman as a positive trait. As Charles Prescott and Grace Giorgio (2005, p. 491) argue, Mina values the option of proposing, not because of rampant sexual desire, but to insure the man she selects is up to her moral standard. By affiliating Mina with New Womanly traits, Stoker produces a strong, progressive woman who is able to actively pursue her own agency.

Despite Mina's apparent skills and abilities, initially there is some doubt raised about her capabilities. This is first evident when Harker admits he omitted some of the horrors from his experience at Dracula's castle to Mina, as he believed "it would shock and frighten her to death were I to expose my heart to her" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 50). Yet Mina reads his journal and her reaction, after the initial shock, is indicative of her strength and efficiency. Mina is not shocked or frightened by Harker's revelations, but rather, she says "I shall be prepared. I shall get my typewriter this very hour and begin transcribing...perhaps, if I am ready, Jonathan may not be upset, for I can speak for him and never let him be troubled or worried with it all" (Stoker, 1897/2003, pp. 191-192). Not only is Mina intent upon organising Harker's notes, her principle instinct

here is to protect him, which goes against the passive role normally assigned Victorian woman. She is such a resilient woman that, even after hearing about Lucy's violent end, Mina bears the upsetting news well, divulging she is "not of the fainting disposition" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 238). Later, when Van Helsing underestimates her competence, Mina highlights her skills, and his ignorance, by handing him her diary to read, which is written in shorthand, a form she knows he cannot decipher. Mina admits, "I could not resist the temptation of mystifying him a bit – I suppose it is some of the taste of the original apple that remains still in our mouths" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 195). This is, of course, a reference to the biblical Eve, who was said to have committed the *original sin* when she disobeyed the word of God, by tempting Adam to join her in eating the forbidden apple in the Garden of Eden. It is because of Eve that women were believed to have inherited an inclination towards sinful behaviour (Salisbury, 2001, pp. 120-121). Mina's statement here is a playful reminder of this legacy, indicating that she has become more than this stereotype, by proving herself to be an active and competent woman.

Stoker's characterisation of Mina centres on her intelligence and strength, and it is precisely because of these qualities that she is able to bring together the men in a cohesive way, in the quest against Dracula. In fact, Mina is the character on whose efforts the whole narrative is based, as it is she who efficiently transcribes and collates the knowledge by which Dracula will be destroyed. Mina's tireless typing and organisation of the multiple documents—diary entries, newspaper clippings, and letters—into a chronological order enables a linear story to emerge. As all the information passes through Mina before reaching the others, she becomes the link between the male characters and their knowledge, and she is the means that binds them together. Van Helsing acknowledges this when, having read a typewritten journal, he says "This paper is as sunshine. It opens the gate to me. I am daze, I am dazzle, with so much light...I am grateful to you, you so clever woman" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 196). Mina's writing activity, in relation to the late-Victorian context, serves to open up a new role for women, one in which women performing intellectual labours like Mina are valued in a predominantly male field. Van Helsing qualifies this when he exclaims "Ah, that wonderful Madam Mina! She has a man's brain – a brain that a man should have were he much gifted" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 250). Where Alison

Case (1993, p. 232) and Anne Cranny-Francis (1988, p. 70) claim Stoker's moulding of Mina in this fashion negates her femininity, by reducing her to a male figure, a deeper examination of Van Helsing's words unveils a more profound meaning. Indeed, what he indicates here is Mina's ability to cope and excel in the male world, a place in which she is not merely intelligent compared to other women but intelligent compared to both women and men. This is surely a commendation of the modern woman and all she has to offer. Evidently, it is because of Mina's abilities and intellect that the pursuit and destruction of Dracula is possible.

The men do not always want to accept her wisdom, yet Mina is in many ways the unrecognised leader of the group, and it is through her accurate judgements that she becomes the saviour of the story. As the men fall prostrate in one manner or another, Mina is the one who systematically deduces the precise route Dracula must take to return to his castle, and reasons how he can be defeated. With relentless logic, the use of maps, geometrical calculations, and exceptional speculation, Mina provides the group with a plan of attack. Van Helsing indicates this when he proclaims "Our dear Mina is once more our teacher. Her eyes have seen where we were blinded. Now we are on the right track once again, and this time we may succeed" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 376). Moreover, Mina manages to hold the group together even as she increasingly comes under Dracula's control, for it is she who divines a way to overcome Dracula spying on their plans. She says to Van Helsing "I want you to hypnotise me...Do it before the dawn, for I feel that then I can speak, and speak freely" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 332). Evidently, without Mina's thinking ability and analytical power, it is unlikely the men could have defeated Dracula. Eric Kwan-Wai Yu (2006, p. 158) points out that Stoker was ahead of his time in portraying a New Woman figure like Mina, particularly one who surpasses many of the men in terms of intellectual labour. In the ultimate assertion of her value, Stoker ensures Mina's intellectual power surpasses all the other characters, even the brilliant Van Helsing. In going against the dominant views of Victorian women at that time, Stoker constructs a new style of femininity for women, one where they can explore and revel in their agency, and ultimately, become the hero.

Fluidity of Gender Constructions

Having established Mina as a strong and independent woman, whom the male characters rely upon to fulfil their quest, another way Stoker generates resistance to traditional roles is through the fluidity of the gender constructions. This is evident in the male characters' dependence on Mina, which disintegrates classic Victorian ideals of male independence and dominance, and further positions her as a formidable woman. In his article outlining the gender inversion in *Dracula*, Christopher Craft asserts Victorian conventions consider male power as an active force, where the male assumes such roles as the doer, the discoverer, and the defender (1984, p. 108). Stoker distorts these boundaries, diluting the male characters hegemonic male role and assigning them passivity, and in contrast, ensuring Mina's robustness and mobility trespasses into this masculine territory. This characterisation serves to highlight gender roles as a social construction, as well as suggest that feminine as a discourse is something men negotiate too, that it is not only women who produce femininity.

We first witness Harker's fragile disposition, and Mina's desire to assume the role of provider and protector, after the death of Harker's employer. Harker is distressed about inheriting his mentor's business, and Mina remarks "the amount of responsibility...makes him nervous. He begins to doubt himself. I try to cheer him up, and *my* belief in *him* helps him to have a belief in himself" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 168). It seems Harker is not stable enough to operate autonomously, and it falls to Mina to reassure him. Later on in the story, the sight of Dracula in the streets of London further unnerves Harker, evident when Mina remarks of his reaction "The poor dear was evidently terrified at something – very greatly terrified; I do believe that if he had not me to lean and to support him he would have sunk down" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 184). Seemingly, Mina not only operates as an emotional support for her husband but also as a physical one. Again later, after she has been attacked by Dracula, it is Mina who must comfort the panicked male characters, particularly Harker. Before recounting her experience to the men, Mina must first soothe Harker, saying "Do not fret, dear. You must be brave and strong, and help me through this horrible task" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 305). Although she appears to be asking for his help through the ordeal, Mina is in fact the assertive and stable one, and it is she who must alleviate Harker through the

retelling of the encounter. Yet Harker is not the only one requiring Mina's comfort. Learning that the "men were all in tears now. There was no resisting them, and we wept openly. She [Mina] wept too, to see her sweeter counsels had prevailed" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 329), it seems the male characters all break down and that Mina provides the strength to help them through their troubles. In this way, Stoker inverts the perception of gender roles, particularly in regards to notions of femininity, operating during the late nineteenth-century.

Perhaps the most powerful way Stoker collapses the gender boundaries in *Dracula* is through his feminising of the male characters. In a period where sexual desire belonged solely to the active male appetite, that even the most overt male may breach the gender borderline, and thereby undermine his manhood, was a fearful prospect. Historically, according to David Halperin, the act of penetration came to be associated with domination, as the "relation between the insertive and the receptive sexual partner was taken to be the same kind of relation as that obtaining between social superior and social inferior" (1989, p. 260). Thus the hegemonic male, through his role as the sexual penetrator, possesses both power and dominance over females. Early on in the story Harker distorts this notion when he occupies the traditionally receptive role of the female. We witness an effeminised Harker as he lies squirming and coy before the three aggressive female vampires. He divulges, "I lay quiet, looking out under my eyelashes in an agony of delightful anticipation...I could feel the soft, shivering touch of the lips on the supersensitive skin of my throat...just touching and pausing there. I closed my eyes in a languorous ecstasy and waited" (Stoker, 1897/2003, pp. 45-46). In this scene, Harker enjoys a feminine passivity as he awaits this erotic penetration from the female vampire. What makes this worse is Harker does not escape the temptation by his own efforts, but rather, he is saved by Dracula. This incident reverses the traditional role of gothic fiction in which the male hero rescues the female victim. As Anne Williams (1991, p. 448) points out, Harker takes the place of the story's gothic heroine, in that he is sexually vulnerable, trapped in a sinister stone castle, and pining for his lover. In essence, by blending qualities of femininity within the masculine, Harker's behaviour dissolves the boundaries of conventional Victorian gender codes.

Stoker also distorts gender roles when he uses language to connect the emotional trauma the male characters experience with a loss of their virility and masculinity. Traditionally, women have been stereotypically identified as predisposed to a heightened emotional nature, yet Stoker locates this trait in the male characters, and not in Mina (Cranny-Francis, Waring, Stavropoulos & Kirkby, 2003, p. 144). After the death of his father, Arthur is described as looking "desperately sad and broken; even his stalwart manhood seemed to have shrunk somewhat under the strain of his much-tried emotions" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 179). In another scene, Dr. Seward speaks of Quincey's control over his emotions in similar terms, saying "His very heart was bleeding, and it took all the manhood of him – and there was a royal lot of it, too – to keep him from breaking down" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 162). In both cases, the men are described as weak and ineffectual, as basically suffering from a form of impotence as a result of their feminised emotions. Just as women have also historically been linked with hysterics, Stoker projects this trait onto the male characters in an apparent bid to heighten their femininity (Cranny-Francis et al., 2003, p. 144). Seemingly embarrassed by his inappropriate behaviour after Lucy's funeral, Dr. Seward remarks that Van Helsing "gave way to a regular fit of hysterics...he cried till he laughed again; and laughed and cried together, just as a woman does" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 186). Hysteria is again linked to a male character, Arthur, whom Mina says "grew quite hysterical, and raising his open hands, beat his palms together in a perfect agony of grief...With a sob he laid his head on my shoulder, and cried like a wearied child, whilst he shook with emotion" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 245). Stoker collapses gender boundaries in attributing feminine emotions to the male characters, but this depiction also functions as another contrast to Mina's strength and proficiency, as she does not succumb to these debilitating traits.

Dracula's attack on Mina in her marital bedroom is another manifestation of the destabilising of gender boundaries. In one of the most sexually graphic scenes in the novel, Stoker projects images where the confluence of bodily fluids collapses the sacred boundaries separating the masculine and the feminine. This explicit encounter is important enough to be twice presented, first by Dr. Seward as spectator and then by Mina as participant. Dr. Seward observes Dracula "forcing her [Mina's] face down on his bosom...a thin stream trickled down the man's bare breast, which was shown by

his torn-open dress. The attitude of the two had a terrible resemblance to a child forcing a kitten's nose into a saucer of milk to compel it to drink" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 300). Mina's drinking here suggests both a symbolic act of enforced fellatio and breast-feeding. The milk which a mother normally feeds her baby is radically confused in this image, as the substance is not drawn from the female but the male figure. Moreover, the positioning of Mina shows us not a penetration of the neck as we might expect, but instead, Mina is sucking on the breast of Dracula, creating further gender confusion. That this is also a scene of fellatio is made even clearer by Mina's own description of the scene a few pages later, when she recalls how "the blood began to spurt out, he took my hands in one of his, holding them tight, and with the other seized my neck and pressed my mouth to the wound, so that I must either suffocate or swallow some of the – Oh, my God, my God!" (Stoker, 1897/2003, p. 307). That "Oh, my God, my God!" is cleverly placed, with Mina's verbal ejaculation supplanting Dracula's liquid one. Although Mina cannot bring herself to name what she has swallowed, we have already been told it is like milk, and the fact that the blood does not 'spurt' in this case further reiterates this point. In effect, the interfusion of feminine functions to the masculine subject provides a powerful means of crumbling the already shaky gender boundaries, and allows Stoker to revalue the category of femininity.

A New Reflection in the Mirror

Most narratives demand closure of some kind, but as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explains in *The coherence of gothic conventions* (1980, p. 10), the ending of a gothic novel, owing to its inherent unpredictability, often fails to contain the transgressions that the story has put into play. The journal entry that concludes *Dracula* illustrates this point precisely, for it is in this final note that Stoker injects one last inversion of femininity. Motherhood is encoded in this scene, not as the traditional representation of the Madonna and child so revered by the Victorians, but by a distorted version of this image (Vicinus, 1972, p. 75). In announcing the birth of his and Mina's son, Harker does not describe their child as sitting upon its mother's lap, akin to the Victorian idyllic scenario, but instead, the lasting image is of their child perched upon Van Helsing's knee. Consequently, this closing representation of motherhood, where the feminine role has been allocated to a male character, is fissured by the same

transgressive femininity that is threaded throughout the text. By Stoker finishing the novel in this manner, having already opened a space for female agency to perform and highlighted the constructiveness of gender roles, he offers of a type of resistance to the dominant discourse surrounding Victorian women at the time.

In this reading of *Dracula*, the rigid Victorian definition of what constitutes femininity is thrust wide apart. Mina thrives in her role as thinker and protector, a position she would struggle to hold outside the novel. In fact, without Mina's abilities, without her operating outside of her conservative boundaries, Dracula likely would have succeeded in his mission to infiltrate British society. In this way, Mina, who is the epitome of the modern woman so deeply feared by the Victorians, not only helps dispel many of the threats connected to the rising New Woman, she actually becomes the saviour of the nation. Coupled with the gender inversion operating within the text, where the male characters are thoroughly feminised and dependent upon the strength of Mina, *Dracula* functions to redefine notions of femininity. Effectively, with his establishment of a transgressive style of femininity in the novel, Stoker produces a new discourse about the feminine, one in which demonstrates the affirmative possibilities of the newly independent woman.

Approaching the novel in this way supports what Foucault outlined in his theory, as it reveals how gender identity is not a function of biology but a social construct, which can allow for the creation of a plurality of overlapping discourses, and therefore a plurality of femininities. As Foucault notes, this is possible because power, as it operates through discourse, tends to produce its own resistance. That is to say, at the same time a discourse operates to reinforce the dominant ideology, it also acts as a point of resistance and starting point for opposing discursive strategies. Consequently, as discourses can be both an instrument of power and a point of resistance, the multiple subject positions operating within discourses means for every discourse there are alternate readings. This concept is true of the deployment of femininity in *Dracula*. Where chapter two demonstrated how Stoker reinforces the prescribed notions of femininity circulating in the late-nineteenth century, this chapter reveals how he challenges Victorian values at the same time, by transforming the ideas of femininity into new discursive codes.

To disregard Foucault's observations, then, and dismiss the novel as only promoting traditional Victorian ideas of femininity, as many critics and researchers have tended to do, is not only reductive but also denies the essential qualities of gothic literature. In staying true to its gothic flavour, this chapter reveals how Stoker's novel remains unstable, fractured, and unable to close down the disruptive ends. Subsequently, all the various transgressive elements of the text work together to shape a new picture of the feminine, and thereby construct a new form of knowledge. Stoker imagines in *Dracula* a fantasy world where notions of femininity are elastic and ambiguous, and doing so, the persuasive abilities of literature means this new discourse is inevitably, given the novel's popularity, drawn into the wider social system. Once exposed to the real world, once Stoker's transgressive vision of femininity is visible, the power of discourse ensures it can never be extinguished.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has analysed the constructions of femininity operating in Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. As part of the gothic genre, a genre which continually seeks to transgress the social norms in any given era, Stoker's novel projects and plays out the obsessions and anxieties circulating during the late nineteenth-century. *Dracula* was written during a shifting cultural and social landscape, a period of rupture influenced by the degeneration of the British Empire, the immense strains of industrialisation and urbanisation, and worst of all, the destabilising of gender boundaries. Into this climate emerged the New Woman, who challenged the oppressive understandings of female behaviour, sexuality, and domestic responsibility, and instead sought equality and opportunities for self-development outside of the home. The New Woman's push for social change provoked tremendous fear in the Victorians, and subsequently, she was continually attacked in the pages of the newspaper and periodical press. As a result, the New Woman became one of the emblems for the decay of traditional Victorian values.

It was precisely these forms of construction and regulation of bodies, as evident in the public formation of the New Woman, which compelled French philosopher and social historian Michel Foucault to examine how the Victorian regime operated, particularly in terms of sexuality. For Foucault, gender identity is a cultural construct, produced by various forms of knowledge, or discourses, rather than as a result of a natural or biological imperative. As discourse, and the power attached to it, is a productive force, Foucault argues it is therefore capable of offering counterattacks against the dominant trends. In this way, discourses can facilitate subversive possibilities, by using the discourse in ways for which it was not intended. Consequently, at the same time a discourse operates to reinforce the dominant ideology, it also acts as a point of resistance and starting point for opposing discursive strategies. This premise is demonstrated in *Dracula*, where Stoker simultaneously represents two different notions of the feminine: a monstrous style of femininity and a transgressive style of femininity.

Reflecting the majority of criticism written about the construction of femininity in the novel, Stoker projects a monstrous style of femininity onto Lucy and the female vampires. He positions them as the epitome of the sexualised woman, and accordingly, their bodies are produced as a site of contamination and danger. Stoker marks these female characters as the infected vampire alien, filling their bodies with negative connotations of female blood, and emphasising the deadly threat of their vampire mouths. He also elucidates monstrous femininity by highlighting the maternal dysfunction Lucy and the female vampires' exhibit. With their explicit sexuality, the female characters abandon their traditional role of mother and wife, and in so doing, transform into the predatory mother who consumes children as a source of nourishment. Coupled with their participation in non-reproductive sex, Lucy and the female vampires are the ultimate threat to the survival of the British Empire. Ultimately, the female bodies are reclaimed in the end, thereby restoring conservative Victorian ideals. Yet this is only one demonstration of femininity operating in *Dracula*. At the same time as Stoker reinforces traditional Victorian gender roles he also produces a counterattack to these dominant trends.

Where this thesis deviates from the popular approach to the novel is by demonstrating how Stoker generates a type of resistance to the dominant Victorian notions of the feminine. He achieves this through Mina and the male characters, by producing a transgressive style of femininity which contests the rigid boundaries of late nineteenth-century British society. One way he accomplishes this is by offering a space in which female agency can perform. This is visible in Mina's intelligence and independence, as well as her ability to bring together the men in a cohesive way. Ultimately, it is Mina who is the saviour in the story. Another way Stoker produces resistance to traditional roles is visible in the fluidity of the gender constructions. This is evident by the male characters' dependence on Mina, which disintegrates classic Victorian ideals of male independence and dominance, and cements her position as a formidable woman. Moreover, attributing feminine emotions and behaviours to the male characters, together with the collapse of bodily fluids, serves to create further gender slippages. In challenging the dominant perceptions about femininity in the Victorian regime, the novel functions to redefine these ideas, and in doing so, prise open a discursive space in which the emerging New Woman could develop.

The influencing power of *Dracula* stems from its ability to produce and perpetuate ideologies in the wider social system. This is possible, Foucault would remind us, as literature is a form of cultural construction, which acts like other institutions by promoting or negating a particular discourse. Just as the distribution of power is continually shifting over time, discourses too are constantly changing, and so what is held to be illegal or immoral in one historical period may be acceptable or pass unnoticed in another. What we witness with Stoker's unsettling of the late-Victorian gender *status quo*, then, is a transition from traditional views about femininity to a more modern and liberal regard for the value of women. At the close of the nineteenth-century the New Woman was still battling to have her voice heard and her goals fulfilled, yet it is because of the persuasive ability of literature that her envisioned status, such as Stoker illustrates in *Dracula*, gradually became a reality. In counteracting the assumption the New Woman's advancement posed a threat to the British nation, Stoker paints an image of the potential worth and positive contribution of the autonomous New Woman. In essence, Stoker's novel appears to partake of an emergent, and oppositional, discourse of the New Woman.

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